

Proceedings of the 9th International Scientific Conference Rural Development 2019

Edited by prof. Asta Raupelienė

ISSN 1822-3230 (Print)

ISSN 2345-0916 (Online)

Article DOI: <http://doi.org/10.15544/RD.2019.079>

NEW VIEW TO THE LIVING CONDITIONS IN RURAL AREAS

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Human living conditions are the opportunity to meet his everyday needs in the field of housing, trade, gastronomy, living services, health care, education, culture, leisure. In order to offer a new perspective on living conditions, we have linked them to rural social infrastructure. The purpose of the article is to present of the ways of defining the concept of living conditions indicated in the literature. To achieve the main goal, the following research tasks were formulated: (1) to indicate of similarities between definitions and different elements (2) propose a new approach to defining living conditions (from a local point of view, for rural areas). These questions guide our research work in order to gain a better understanding about how living conditions in rural areas develop. The main research methods were used: analysis and generalization of scientific literature and documents, abstraction method, logical and systematical reasoning, graphic presentation of comparison, abstracts and other methods. The research results disclosed that the living conditions could be highly affected by other spheres of life; highly diverse requires considering the subjective perceptions and assessments of the people who live and work in these rural area. There is a direct link between quality of life and living conditions. A new approach to defining living conditions in rural areas is to relate living conditions to the social infrastructure.

Keywords: rural areas, living conditions, social infrastructure.

INTRODUCTION

Rural areas face unprecedented challenges. The rural community is rapidly aging and areas are becoming empty, as young families do not return to their native village. Living conditions, especially rural social infrastructure, are not attractive to young people. There are rural areas in Europe where rural living conditions are only developing in a negative manner or do not satisfy the needs of the local population.

In recent years, both scientists and practitioners have become increasingly interested in assessing the quality of life and living conditions of rural and urban residents. The interest results from the desire to treat the concept of development in a multilateral manner and the desire to learn not only the economic sphere of development, which definitely dominated in earlier studies, but also the social or ecological sphere. At the same time, it is accompanied by an increase in interest in the local context of measuring quality and living conditions. This is due to the fact that local conditions also related to local development policy significantly determine the living conditions of local communities. Each territorial unit is a place of residence characterized by a particular spatial arrangement of housing and other social infrastructure, the natural environment, public services and the local labor market. The functions performed by a place create its specific advantages and certain living conditions (Meyers, 1987; Mandal 2013; Błoński et al., 2017).

At the same time, in the theoretical considerations on the assessment of the standard of living of inhabitants, there is a lack of uniform terminology, where there are commonly attempts to connect the terms quality and standard of living with well-being (Zeliaś, 2000; Stettner, 2016) and there are difficulties in precisely defining the boundary between their definitions (Michalska-Żyła, 2016). Quality of life is often considered and analyzed alongside living conditions, living standards, dignity of life, social well-being or these terms are treated as synonyms (Błoński et al., 2017).

Analyzing the research conducted so far to assess the standard of living, it can be concluded that most often the research concerns a high level of generality (country level) and the subjective dimension of the quality and living conditions of the population (Eurostat, 2015; Social Diagnosis, 2013). In addition, this issue is relatively rarely addressed in relation to the rural areas (Spellerberg, Huschka, Habich, 2006; D'Agostini, Fantini, 2008; Shucksmith et al., 2009; Murawska, 2012; Rimkuvienė, 2013; Spoor, Tasciotti, Peleah, 2014; Liu Wen Tao, 2015; Michalska-Żyła, 2016).

The aim of the research is to present the ways of defining the concept of living conditions indicated in the literature. To achieve the main aim, the following research tasks were formulated: to indicate of similarities between definitions and different elements; to propose a new approach to defining living conditions (from a local point of view, for rural areas).

Theoretical research methods have been employed in this research: analysis and generalization of scientific literature, documents, abstraction method, logical and systematical reasoning, graphic presentation of comparison and other methods.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Living conditions - theoretical dilemmas

Living conditions in a given territorial unit have an impact on people's health and work (Liu Wen Tao, 2015). The growth and transformation of the economy (such as the circular economy, the bio-economy, sharing economy) living conditions greatly improved, but some of the social problems still to be solved. The concept of living conditions, if commonly used in the literature, is defined very differently (Table 1), depending on the context used. Human living conditions are the opportunity to meet his every day, elementary needs in the field of housing, trade, gastronomy, living services, health care, education, culture, leisure (Zeliaś, 2000).

Table 1. The evolution of terms of living conditions: standard of living and quality of life

Term used /author	Definition	Indicated spheres
Standard of living		
Standard of living (experts of United Nations commission 1954 – Pawelek, 2004)	Overall real conditions of people's lives and the degree of their material and cultural satisfaction of needs using streams of goods and services payable as well as from social funds.	Sum of chargeable goods and services, the degree of satisfaction needs.
Standard of living (Luszniewicz, 1982)	The degree of satisfying the needs of households (material and cultural) realized through streams of paid goods and services as well as through streams of collective consumption funds.	Seven categories of needs were indicated: food, dwelling, healthcare, education, recreation (spending free time), social security and financial security.
Standard of living (Bywalec, Wydymus, 1992)	The degree to which the population's needs are met, which is achieved through the individual and collective consumption of goods and services by individuals and the use of natural and social assets.	The needs satisfaction degree, benefits from the environment.
Standard of living (Fontinelle, 2008)	Level of wealth, comfort, access to goods by people from various socioeconomic classes in specific areas; there are many measures describing living conditions, e.g. income, employment opportunities, cost of goods and services, life expectancy, poverty rate, class disparities, quality and affordability of housing, working hours required to purchase the necessary items, gross domestic product, quality, price and access to health care, quality and access to education, infrastructure development, economic and political stability of the country, environmental quality, level of security.	Social infrastructure level.
Standard of living (Cvrlje, Ćorić, 2010)	The possibilities (ease) of meeting the needs of individuals or groups of people and available level of welfare; needs include physical living conditions, consumption of goods and services, access to other resources.	The strong coherence between the standard of living and the quality of life.
Standard of living (Winiarczyk-Raźniak, Raźniak, 2011)	Degree of meeting human needs as an effect of consumption of goods and use of services.	The six groups of indices: environmental protection, technical infrastructure, healthcare, education, culture.
Standard of living (Patsios, Hillyard, 2012)	It determines what people have, what they do and where they live; it depends on the personal preferences of people and the degree of possession of resources that limit or do not limit them in owning, performing or participating in initiatives (money, housing, districts, social services and social networks as well as a number of social and recreational activities).	Covers different areas of life: people's assets, activities, living environment
Standard of living (Eurostat, 2015)	It can be stated by the means of three different parts: income, consumption and material conditions.	Income, consumption and material conditions.
Standard of living (Wawrzyniak, 2016)	20 variables divided into 7 groups such as: security, education, health care, food, dwelling conditions, natural environment, transport and communications	The living conditions highly diverse
Standard of living (Brambert, Kiniorska, 2018)	12 indexes: percentage of population at pre-working and working, deaths per 1,000 inhabitants; natural increase and net migration per 1,000 population; useful floor area of dwellings per capita; number of flats per 1,000 inhabitants; percentage of users of water supply network and sewage system in the total population; percentage of unemployed persons in the population at working age; entities per 1,000 inhabitants at working age; income per capita.	Demographics, housing, water and sewage infrastructure, unemployment, entities, income.

Term used /author	Definition	Indicated spheres
Living conditions (Uglis, Kozera-Kowalska, 2019)	Attractiveness of rural areas depends from living conditions - conditions for living, working and business activities.	The living conditions are attractiveness of rural areas
Quality of life		
Quality of life (Gillingham, Reece, 1980)	The degree of satisfaction a person obtains from the consumption of goods and services, spending free time and as a result of using other material and social conditions of the environment (place) in which the person resides.	The degree of satisfaction needs.
Quality of life (Campbell, 1981)	The degree of satisfaction, among others from family and professional life, relations between neighbors, social relations, health status, ways of spending free time, education, profession and general standards within a given local community.	Factors from the category of needs.
Quality of life (WHO, 1995)	The way a person perceives his position in life in relation to the culture and the current system of values in which he lives and also taking into account goals, expectations, standards, norms and interests.	Indicators: ability to play life roles, adaptability, psychological well-being and functioning within social groups.
Quality of life (Casini et al., 2011)	Real use of the opportunities offered by the territory, including the services provided.	The actual way of using the available services and possibilities depends on the place.
Quality of life (Słaby, 2012)	It is a synthesis of well-being in the material sense and well-being in the mental sense and concerns several dimensions of human life, economic and non-material, including e.g. diseases, effects of aging.	A synthesis of well-being
Quality of life (Boncinelli et al., 2015)	Access to basic services: health and social care, education in connection with the accessibility of the area and its features, e.g. environmental.	The availability of public services (quantitative approach).
The quality of life (Bernard, 2018)	The quality of life in urban and rural areas differs in the following aspects: social exclusion; health; sanity; living conditions (which means satisfaction with accommodation conditions); material deprivation; trust in local government; the ability to make ends meet; life satisfaction.	The living conditions highly diverse

Living conditions include all environmental factors and the relationships between them that determine the satisfaction of human needs with regard to the consumption of material goods and services. Living conditions can be classified as social living conditions, ecological living conditions, personal living and working conditions (Bywalec, 1986). While the quality of life means the degree of individual satisfaction of needs (which is subjective and is very difficult to assess). The standard of living means equipping households with material goods (Słaby, 1990), which depends on the income of the population, living conditions can be considered as access to goods in the human environment that are independent of man (infrastructure, economic potential, environmental areas).

According to Markowski (1987), living conditions are explained as the overall relationships in which society, household or person live, and can be defined by four basic components:

- 1) level of economic well-being (population's income), which ensures achievement of a certain level of satisfaction of human needs;
- 2) degree of equipment in housing and communal infrastructure;
- 3) degree of equipment in social infrastructure;
- 4) conditions of the natural environment in which man lives, e.g. the degree of water and air pollution (Markowski 1987).

In relation to the concept of objective quality of life, the term living conditions is used interchangeably. In reality, however, improving living conditions does not necessarily translate into an increase in the level of life satisfaction. This is due to the fact that determining the level of satisfaction with life is partly subjective. Theoretical considerations indicate that life satisfaction is a subjective assessment of the quality of life, although the relationship between the objective and subjective approach is not clearly defined. The subjective sense of satisfaction with objective living conditions depends on many factors, i.e. the relative sense of victimization or the system of accepted values (Borys, 2002).

The notion of dignity of life also appears in the literature, understood as the lack of feeling of deprivation, which may result from the negative aspects of people's lives in the changing economic realities (Słaby, 1990). The dignity of life is mainly affected by a shortage of goods, but also their excess can cause a feeling of a less dignified life (Górniak-Durose, 2009).

According to S. Kot (2004) three meanings of the concept of quality of life can be distinguished. These are quality of life as material and social conditions of life; quality of life as personal experiences (experiences); quality of life as a valuable life, full of admiration and dedication to others. Literature also includes the term social well-being, which may include the following three spheres of human needs: having (to have), feeling (to love) and existence (to be) (Allardt, 1993). The standard of living was supposed to include material needs and was determined by the first set of human needs (to have). In turn, quality of life involves meeting intangible needs that are related to the other two areas of human need (that is, love and being). Comparing scientists' opinion about living conditions with the peculiarities of rural social

infrastructure development, we can assume that living conditions in rural areas are determined by the conformity of rural social infrastructure and quality of public services to the needs of rural population (Figure 1). In order to offer a new perspective on living conditions, we have linked them to rural social infrastructure.

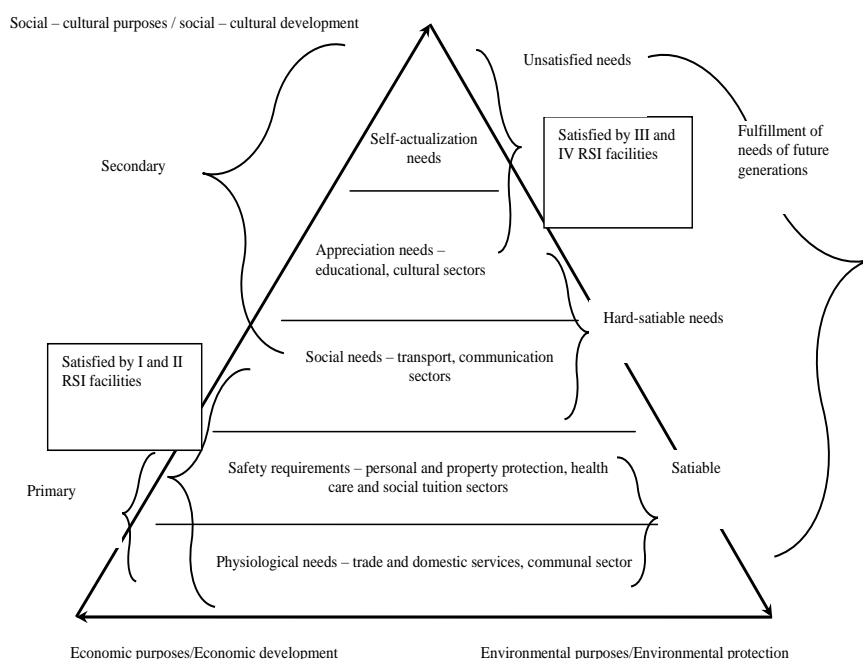


Figure 1. Pyramid of resident needs and rural social infrastructure (RSI)¹ sectors for sustainable development of rural areas (developed in accordance with Atkočiūniene, 2000; Čiegis, Pečkaitienė, 2013; Atkočiūniene, Aleksandravičius, Kiaušienė, Vazonienė, Pakeltienė, Lukė, 2014)

Rural development is usually measured by economic indicators and public services are provided at the lowest cost. The specifics of rural quality of life is that the density of social infrastructure in rural areas is very low. Most public services are concentrated in district or subdivision centers and creates living conditions there. Information technologies applied in the provision of services help to bring services closer to the rural population. Given the benefits and frequency of consumption of goods and services, the intensity of meeting population needs is consistent with the needs classification structure. The purpose of the goods and services provided by the first level of rural social infrastructure objects is to enable to meet the basic (first necessity) needs, of the second level - everyday needs, of the 3rd level – periodical, of the 4th level – occasional needs. The first and second level of social infrastructure goods and services help to meet primary needs and have to be as close as possible to the households of the rural population, while the third and fourth level of social infrastructure goods and services help to meet secondary needs and are usually available in local and regional centers. In addition, all the needs are interdependent and can be met by different levels of rural social infrastructure. When designing living conditions, it is essential to set goals, to achieve them with the involvement of stakeholders, to integrate the planning of all rural social infrastructure sectors (education, training, counseling; telecommunications; utilities and household services; transport; culture, sports and recreation; and social care and protection of personal and property) development.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

1. There are varied, narrow and wide range definitions of living conditions in the literature. A new approach to defining living conditions in rural areas is to relate living conditions to the social infrastructure.
2. Researchers, depending on the purpose of research, adopt one of the selected definitions of living conditions (without justification for their choice) and a set of variables describing living conditions subordinated to this; it causes difficulties with compare the results of studies of different authors (time, space).
3. In the case of an attempt to measure living conditions, the adopted definition results from the availability of statistical data. The living conditions highly diverse requires considering the subjective perceptions and assessments of the people who live and work in these rural area.
4. Living conditions can be highly affected by other spheres of life. There is a direct link between quality of life and living conditions. Quality of life depends on living conditions and vice versa. The utilities and household services, transport sector play a crucial role in living conditions and are a direct factor affecting the availability and accessibility of other sectors of social infrastructure.

¹ RSI - rural social infrastructure.

5. Living conditions is a social infrastructure and can be considered as access to goods located in the human environment, which are independent of inhabitants (infrastructure: technical and social, economic potential, environmental areas).
6. Living conditions is the result of the action of local authorities, which improve the competitiveness of managed areas, increase the multifunctionality of the area through infrastructure development, stimulate entrepreneurship, provide good quality services, inspire social activity of inhabitants and care for the natural environment. Information technologies applied in the provision of services help to bring services closer to the rural population.

Acknowledgments. The paper was funded by the Warsaw University of Life Sciences as part of the support of scientific research teams in 2019.

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